Table of Contents

1. Allegiances
2. Prologue
3. Chapter 1 (Juniperpaw)
4. Chapter 2 (Jadepaw)
5. Chapter 3 (Spiritpaw)
6. Chapter 4 (Spiritpaw)
7. Chapter 5 (Whisppaw)
8. Chapter 6 (Spiritpaw)
9. Chapter 7 (Whisppaw)
10. Chapter 8 (Juniperpaw)
11. Chapter 9 (Juniperpaw)
12. Chapter 10 (Jadepaw)
13. Chapter 11 (Spiritpaw)
14. Chapter 12 (Juniperpaw)
15. Chapter 13 (Juniperpaw)
16. Chapter 14 (Whisppaw)
17. Chapter 15 (Wisppaw)
18. Chapter 16 (Spiritpaw)

Allegiances

ShadeClan

Leader Nightfrost- black tom with blood stained front paws and icy cold blue eyes

Second in Command Blazeshimmer- battle-scarred, large ginger tabby tom

Third in Command Hollowclaw- brown tom with razor sharp claws, was a stolen kit

Fourth in Command Lightningstrike- black she-cat with jagged yellow stripes on flank

Thieves

Pineneedle- brown tabby she-cat with brilliant green eyes

Squirreltail- brown-and-gray she-cat with a bushy tail

Thundercloud- yellow-and-black tabby tom

Whitesky- white she-cat with bright blue eyes

Hollynight- black she-cat

Learners:

Fighters

Lionfang- scruffy yellow tom

Tigerblaze- ginger-and-black tabby tom

Lizardheart- brown-and-ginger female

Learners:

Spiritpaw- large dark ginger tabby tom with determined golden eyes

Healers

Fawncall- small brown she-cat with white spots on back

Learners:

Orangepaw- long-furred orange tabby she-cat

Clan-Born Queens

Lizardheart, mother of Thundercloud's kits: Spiderkit (black tom with a red back) and Flashkit (bright yellow tabby tom)

Fawncall, mother of Nightfrost's kits: Slatekit (dark, stone grey tom) and Wolfkit (black-and-white tom)

Whitesky- expecting Hollowsky's kits

Pineneedle- expecting Tigerblaze's kits

Stolen-Kit Queens

Oceansplash- mother of Brownclaw's kits: Duskkit (dark brown, almost black, tabby she-cat), Mintkit (silver tabby tom with frosty blue-green eyes) and Venomkit (muscular brown tom with gray stripes)

Locaters

Silverwing- lithe silver tabby she-cat

Oceansplash- dark gray, with a bluish tint, she-cat with dark blue eyes splashed with a lighter blue

Redspark- dark ginger tom

Learners:

Hunters

Greenstream- light footed brown tabby she-cat with bright green eyes

Blackfang- black tabby tom

Guards

Brownclaw- brown tabby tom

Treefall- brown-and-and-cream she-cat with amber eyes

Learners:

Sharppaw- white-and-brown tabby tom

Elders

Moonspots- yellow tom with gray patches

Stolen Kits

Rockkit- sturdy brown-and-grey mottled tom

Darkkit- dark gray tom with pitch black paws and tail tip

Shadekit- dusty gray she-cat with darker stripes and green eyes

Frostkit- white she-cat with large yellow eyes

LightClan

Leader Lightstar- pure white she-cat with friendly, light green eyes

Deputy Solarburst- black tom with bursts of orange and red

Medicine Cat Yellowlily- light yellow she-cat with darker stripes

Warriors

Russetstream- russet she-cat

Sharptooth- sturdy brown tabby tom with unusually long, sharp fangs

Goldenfleck- gray she-cat with golden flecks

Songflight- pure white she-cat

Timberwood- large brown tabby tom

Learners:

Glowingpaw- silky bluish-black she-cat

Sunpaw- white tom with yellow stripes and sharp blue eyes

Sweetpaw- white she-cat with soft green eyes

Rescuers

Palebird- pale orange she-cat

Flightheart- yellow tabby she-cat

Gingerleg- black tom with a ginger leg

Runningstorm- dark, stormy gray tom

Emberpelt- light ginger she-cat

Smokebreeze- smoky gray tom

Winterstorm- white tom with fierce blue eyes

Learners:

Rosepaw- rosy ginger she-cat

Tigerpaw- dark orange tom with black stripes and fierce green eyes

Amberpaw- brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Blazepaw- dark russet tom with a black chest and golden eyes

Lifepaw- orange she-cat with golden eyes

Searchers

Honeywind- golden-and-white tabby she-cat

Darkberry- pitch black tom with berry blue eyes

Learners

Dewpaw- pale silver she-cat

Wavepaw- silver she-cat with bluish stripes

Bluepaw- bluish she-cat with blue eyes

Heatherpaw- wiry brown tabby she-cat with fierce heather blue eyes

Spies

Ivyheart- brown and silver tabby she-cat

Shellfang- silver tom with darker stripes

Learners:

Sandpaw- sandy gray tom

Flamepaw- dark ginger tabby tom

Petalpaw- white she-cat with pinkish eyes

Wisppaw- small, slender black she-cat with orange and red stripes as well as pale blue eyes

Queens

Flightheart- mother of Runningstorm's kits: Duskkit (dark gray she-cat with a yellow underbelly), Moonkit (dark gray she-cat with lighter stripes) and Sparkkit (pale yellow she-cat with darker flecks)

Goldenfleck- mother of Solarburst's kit: Shadowkit (black tom with yellow paws and red flecks)

Lightstar- expecting Sharptooth's kits

Honeywind- expecting Darkberry's kits

Rescued Kits

Blossomkit- calico she-cat with small, gentle paws

Coldkit- pure white tom with ginger paws and ear tips

Cloudkit- furry white-and-tan she-cat with a gray striped tail

Snakekit- slim mottled brown tom

Crowkit- large, glossy furred black tom

SilverClan

Leader Sweetstar- ginger-and-white she-cat

Deputy Russetleaf- russet she-cat

Medicine Cat Apprentice Juniperpaw- brown she-cat with distant green eyes; blind in her left eye while deaf in her right ear

Followers

Brightstream- light yellow she-cat with ginger stripes

Sharpfang- light tan tom

Twilightberry- gray and silver tabby tom

Willowtree- silver she-cat with long silky fur

Foxhowl- shaggy ginger tom with a white tail tip

Beechdawn- sandy brown she-cat with orange-amber eyes

Gingerpelt- pale ginger tabby she-cat

Graydapple- dappled gray tom

Apprentice: Patchpaw

Rosethorn- brown she-cat with ginger stripes

Jackalhowl- golden tom with large ears and a long, fluffy tail

Apprentices

Patchpaw- calico female with fierce green eyes

Wondering Bird- confident ginger-and-black tom with crimson eyes

Eternal Night- pitch black she-cat with sharp winter blue eyes flecked with red

Jaded Soul- prickly silver tabby tom with guarded green eyes, a ring of red surrounding his pupils

Queens

Willowtree- mother of Sharpfang's kits: Bramblekit (dark brown tom with tan stripes), Silverkit (silver tabby tom with sky blue eyes), Rainkit (brown tabby she-cat with rain blue eyes) and Hawkkkit (dark brown tom with a light tan stripe along his spine)

Beachdawn- expecting Twilightberry's kits

Gingerpelt- expecting Foxhowl's kits

Elders

Darkstorm- dark gray tom with jagged black stripes and foggy blind green eyes

Opalstone- pure white she-cat with blue eyes and is hard of hearing

Talia's Adoption Center:

Leader Talia- long furred dark gray she-cat, her left eye is missing

Adviser Leafrustle- dark brown tom with dark, leafy green eyes

Medicine Cat (still learning) Yellowpaw- blind yellow she-cat

Warriors

Ginger- ginger she-cat

Forest- dark brown tabby tom with forest green eyes

Ava- lithe silver tabby she-cat

Owl- burly mottled brown tom with amber eyes

Learners

Sorrelpaw- reddish-brown she-cat, is currently in a coma

Cloverpaw- brown tabby she-cat with clover green eyes

Jadepaw- large yellow tabby tom with jade green eyes

Finders

Palestripe- dark golden she-cat with paler stripes

Loon- skinny and small ragged-furred brown tabby tom

Learners

Darkpaw- pure black tom

Eclipsepaw- dark gray-and-yellow tom

Maplepaw- maple brown she-cat

Queens

Palestripe- mother of Leafrustle's kits: Kestrelkit (golden-brown tabby tom), Sagekit (golden she-cat with brown stripes) and Rowankit (dark brown tom with reddish spots)

Ginger- expecting Owl’s kits

Kits up for adoption

Fallenkit- black-and-brown tom with green eyes, his front left leg is twisted

Prologue

In the land where the deceased walk, sat a lone white-and-silver she-cat; her willowy tail wrapped neatly against her paws. Her shoulders were hunched and her golden eyes gleamed with sorrow as she stared down at the surface of a small pond. After her arrival to StarClan, the she-cat had felt at home until she learned what was happening below. Looking up from the pond, she glanced around until her eyes landed on a silver tabby. His stride was full of confidence and he held his head high as he joined her.

"I'm glad you showed," he greeted, his amber eyes narrowing as he too looked down at the pond's surface. "It's a pity really…"

"I'm amazed you even showed your face!" an agitated ginger-and-silver tom spat and he glared harshly at the she-cat. "She was *your* responsibility and now looks at the mess we're in!"

"I couldn't do anything once he chose her..." the she-cat whispered and her eyes glazed over momentarily as she yet again risked a glance down at the pond.

"What does the Seeing Pool show?" this time an elderly cat came, her once neat yellow fur was tattered and knotted but despite her age, her green eyes shined with a sharp intelligence.

"She's with a Fallen," the she-cat murmured. "The one named Wondering Bird is with her."

"Don't blame yourself, Softheart," the old she-cat limped over to her and placed her tail reassuringly on the depressed white cat's shoulder. "Even I couldn't foresee this."

"We should have let her die sooner!" the same ginger cat snarled and he lashed his tail angrily. "Then Softheart wouldn't be dead and we wouldn't be in this mess!"

A low growl emanated from Softheart's chest and she whirled around to stand face to face with the loud-mouthed cat. Baring her teeth she hissed in a low, menacing voice. "Take. That. Back."

"Calm down Softheart," the tabby pushed his way in between the two while giving them both a sharp, silencing glower. "And Silver, what's done is done we shouldn't dwell on the past but instead look to the future."

"Whatever," Silver shrugged but under his breath, purposely loud enough for the others to hear, he grumbled. "But if Juniperpaw died a kit than the Shadow Master wouldn't have chosen her."

"Juniperpaw is doing the best for her Clan, that's all she's ever been doing," Softheart's eyes narrowed once again and her fluffy tail lashed in agitation.

"Well her best sucks," he scoffed while crouching as if to issue a challenge to the angered she-cat. "We should just give Sweetstar an excuse to exile her; once she's gone all we have to do is find her a replacement… one that isn't a Fallen."

"Enough you two!" the elder snapped before Softheart could lunge forward. "I swear you're like a bunch of dogs fighting over a piece of crow-food. We shall send an omen to a cat worthy of becoming SilverClan's next medicine cat and, like we always do, we shall let the Living work it out."

"Technically, Juniperpaw is no longer living," Silver snarked which earned him a fierce cuff to his ears by the silver tabby.

"We cannot command the living!" the elder declared with such force that the arrogant tom flinched before quickly recovering under the glances of the others. "We can only guide them down the right paths."

"Or the wrong ones," Silver growled under his breath before turning and stalking off. Over his shoulder he called out to the

elderly cat. “You know best, Dusksun,” his tone was mocking and before she could scold him yet again; Silver was gone.

Chapter 1 (Juniperpaw)

“Say Bird,” the words came out softly and I forced my gaze away from the rising sun in order to look into his eyes; crimson eyes the color of freshly drawn blood. “Tell me more about what I just got myself into.”

Bird looked down at me and closed his eyes for a brief moment, searching silently for the right words. “It’s hard to explain,” he finally sighed. “Why don’t you ask me questions and I’ll try to answer.”

I considered this, my tail tip twitching thoughtfully before I nodded. “Very well… then my first question is this: What are we called?”

“We have many names but the more common ones are the Cursed and the Fallen,” Bird explained and I frowned, those didn’t exactly sound like good names. “This is due to the fact that we can never die, forced to wonder the ever changing world while we remain frozen. It is truly a sad existence…”

What have I gotten myself into? I swallowed; it was a natural reflex that even more immortal body couldn’t stop, before reluctantly brining up the next question. The fact that Bird was being honest with me, at least I’m fairly certain he was truthful, fueled my curiosity; even if the answers brought on even more doubt. “When did the Shadow Master come into existence and what exactly is his purpose?”

Bird mauled over the question, his tail tip twitching and a frown on his face. Finally he replied. “It’s hard to say but… we believe the Shadow Master was formed when StarClan and the Place of No Stars first appeared. The three are parallels of each other and without one, everything would become unbalanced. Or at least, that’s our theory.”

“Unbalanced how?” I frowned dubiously, but then

shrugged. Even though it was hard to tell with him being stuck in the body of a twenty moon old cat, I could tell that he was way older than the others.

"All kinds of disasters will wreck havoc on the world. Diseases… famine… earthquakes… droughts… the list goes on and on."

"Lovely…" I muttered softly under my breath and quickly stored those awful images deep into my mind for later. "Say Bird and I'm sorry if this is a tad personal, but how did you die?"

Bird reeled back in surprise and I winced at my bluntness; of course it was personal. Frankly if some stranger walked up to me asking about my death, I wouldn't exactly want to share it either. "Y-you don't have to tell me," I quickly exclaimed as I leapt to my paws, my tail quivering nervously.

"I understand why you're curious…" Bird sighed. "Juniperpaw, I was murdered. Murdered in cold blood by the cat I trusted most in this world."

It was my turn to flinch back, my eyes widening at the harsh, venomous tone that filled Bird's voice. The sudden contrast was startling, and it took me a moment or two to find my voice. "I-I see," those were the only words that my mind could form. It must have hurt him a lot, to be turned on by someone you cared for so deeply… "Soul, let's go back to camp."

~~~~~~

"Juniperpaw," our orange-and-white leader gestured for me to join her and, after a quick glance at Bird, I quickly joined her. Sweetstar sat in the shade of the camp and she smiled warmly as I came to her. "Tonight, you must go to the Willow Grove. Normally Softheart would have taken you, but since she's… I'll be taking you."

"The Willow Grove…" I whispered numbly. The place StarClan was strongest and where SilverClan's medicine cat would go every new moon to meet with our ancestors. Would I be able to meet Softheart there? Ever since Shadow Master revived me, I
~~~~~~

hadn't even heard a whisper from my beloved mentor. "Are we going now?"

"If we are to reach it before dawn, than yes we must leave right away," Sweetstar stood up and began for the exit. She paused and glanced back at me to add. "However if you feel any exhaustion don't be afraid to ask for we'll have plenty of time for a break or two."

I nodded, Sweetstar didn't know after all, she was completely clueless about how I was cured and of how I no longer felt fatigue I have to keep it that way. If the Clan found out about me, everything would be gone. I would be marked a freak and chased out for sure… Pain constricted my chest at the thought, I didn't want them to hate me or ostracize me; I just want everything to continue like nothing had changed. "Hurry up Juniperpaw," Sweetstar, while I was lost in thought, was already at the exit.

I came to her and followed her outside; the red dawn sky was now replaced by a bright pale blue one that was dotted with fluffy white clouds. The sun hovered high in the sky, its rays of light keeping us warm from the blasting cold wind that reminded me that New-leaf had only just arrived. Fluffing out my short fur I couldn't help but long for the upcoming Green-leaf.

Would I finally be able to meet Softheart again? This thought kept creeping unwanted into my mind as we made our way for the grove. Ever since Shadow Master had revived me, I hadn't once dreamt of her but as we continued to grow closer to the Willow Grove, a dreadful feeling began to weave its cold tentacles deep inside me. I couldn't shake the feeling that I would never see her again and it deeply disturbed me.

So by the time we arrived to the Willow Grove, all my anticipation had spiraled down to my paws and only knotted worry filled me. But still, the breathtaking sight of this place made me gasp and my eyes widened. By now it had become dusk and, as the sun slipped away, the Grove began to glow. The leaves, which had been a normal green when we arrived, were now glowing a bright bluish-white and they only grew brighter as the stars appeared. "Come Juniperpaw, we must get the ceremony under way,"

Sweetstar padded over to the closest tree. “StarClan, tonight our new apprentice has come. May you grace her with your presence and grant her your wisdom.”

Sweetstar then gestured for me to lie down among the roots of the glowing willow, and I complied. I curled up between two of the larger roots and closed my eyes, expecting to be among StarClan when I opened them. Only… *I was **there** the realm of the Shadow Master.*

It was exactly the same as last time with strange purple and green lights floating all around. If it wasn’t for those pale lights, this place would be in eternal darkness but instead of settling my nerves they only made the place creepier than it already was. Mist so thick I couldn’t see my paws swirled wildly around and I let out an annoyed growl at how cold it was.

“Welcome back to my humble adobe, Juniperpaw,” Shadow Master purred and the mist came together to form a rippling shape that resembled a cat.

I stiffened, my fur beginning to bristle as chills ran down my spine before I forced myself to relax. Taking in a deep breath, I spoke. “It is an honor to be back,” the lie came smoothly; to be honest I would have preferred to be anywhere but here. Still instincts told me to please him or StarClan knows what would happen.

“I’m glad,” the body of mist smiled and I found it even creepier when his grin revealed a set of solid teeth. “But enough of formalities, I called you here to give you first mission.”

“My first… mission,” I echoed numbly.

“That’s right but don’t worry I made it simple since you’re new to this,” the Shadow Master stared thoughtfully at me, which sent another shiver down my spine for when I looked squarely at his rippling face, I saw two black voids for eyes. Gulping, I quickly averted my gaze to one of the floating lights. “I want you to locate a cat. Now don’t worry this cat isn’t too far away, so you can also search for a medicine cat for your Clan,” when he said the word Clan his lips curled back scornfully. “I won’t give you much of his details, after all the search is

half the fun, but I will tell you tell you that the one you search for is brown with a white chest and green eyes."

I looked dubiously at the body of mist, making sure to avoid his face, but I refrained from voicing my doubts and instead asked. "What do you want me to do once I find this cat?"

"That's simple, rip out it's throat and leave it for the crows," he spoke in a new tone when he announced this, a fierce hatred that he seemed to have kept bottled away until now. I swallowed and couldn't help but feel sorry for whoever seemed to have ticked him off. "You have no time limit but the longer you take, the less pleased I'll be."

Satisfied, his body returned to normal mist and I was left standing alone in this strange place, my only companion was my heavy fear. What have I gotten myself into?

Chapter 2 (Jadepaw)

“We are not who you think we are…” my ears perked as Owl softly whispered those words, his face looked pained as he prepared himself to speak. What had he been hiding? My mind returned to the fight, despite the pain I was going through at the time I recalled a few snippets of a conversation Owl had with that detestable, crow-food eating Thornscar. An unbridled rage roared through me at the mention of his name and I forced myself to calm down and focus. He had called Owl Blood… something. My ears twitched as I struggled to recall before sighing and giving up. “Keep in mind that it is very hard for me to speak of my past,” Owl continued as he shifted his paws nervously. “I didn’t always go by the name Owl and Loon was not always Loon.”

“Owl and I are from a place in which we regret ever association ourselves with,” it was Loon strolled over to us and I blinked in surprise at the clarity of his gaze. The way he spoke had a way too serious tone to it and the way he held himself was of pride not at all laid-back. “Talia have you heard of Bloodclaw and Venomstrike?”

“Yes…” Talia’s one eye narrowed and a suspicious tone filled her meow. “Why do you ask?”

“Hey mind sharing with me exactly Bloodclaw and Venomstrike are?” I frowned, feeling out of the loop. Those two names meant… wait Bloodclaw… that’s right, Thornscar (that wretched fox-hearted, snake-tongued, murdering, piece of dirt) called Owl that.

Owl let out a soft sigh and for a second I wasn’t sure he would answer my question before he finally spoke. “This happened many moons before you birth Jadepaw… two rogues by the name of Blood and Venom decided to join a Clan. But not just any Clan, they joined BrambleClan. Together, the two rose through their respectable ranks both becoming notorious Fighters. Eventually they were given their named Bloodclaw, for his claws were almost

always stained in the blood of his victims and Venomstrike, for like venom he would strike swiftly, painfully and at the very core of their targets. The two were unstoppable, until one day they meet this one cat…"

"This cat was very precious," Loon picked up where Owl stopped. "Down to their very hearts, she changed them but BrambleClan noticed the slow, subtle changed of their two strongest cats. They…" Loon trailed off and a flash of sorrow filled his blue eyes. Swallowing and, with a shaky voice, he began to speak, "they captured Bloodclaw and Venomstrike, pinned them to the ground and forced them to watch as they tore her apart… they…" he was shaking and with eyes closed, looked away.

"It's okay Loon," Owl gently rested his tail against his friend's shoulder. "They tortured her, killing her slowly and painfully. There was so much blood… she screamed until her voice was hoarse yet they continued until she no longer responded. That was when the two decided never to return to BrambleClan and became travelers yet again."

"What does this…?" I trailed off as realization dawned on me. My whisper was barely audible as shock settled inside of me. "Are you saying you're Bloodclaw… and Venomstrike?"

"Yes, we are them," Owl sighed and he flinched from the pained look I shot him.

"Why didn't you tell me? Don't you trust me?" I shot to my feet and my initial hurt was replaced by anger. "I never would have told a soul!"

"We wanted to forget our past…" Loon explained softly, and I snorted like that was a good enough reason. "But I guess no matter how hard you try to run, your past will always haunt you."

"Look Jadepaw-" Owl began, attempting to calm me down but I cut him off. "Don't talk to me!" upon uttering my vehement words, my fur started to fluff out furiously and my eyes narrowed to slits. "Don't even look at me," turning away I stormed out of the camp, the farther I went into the forest the faster my pace became. I found myself racing through the silent woods, and as my anger

funneled away I became ever more aware of the pain shooting through me with each step.

Finally skidding to a halt, I collapsed to the forest floor and curled into a tight ball. Emotions swirled wildly through me betrayal, pain, anger. I felt so confused… so hurt. “Don’t they trust me?” they were my best friends, and they lied to me. They said that they had always been rogues, never belonging to a Clan but here they are claiming to be from the most infamous kit thief Clan… why didn’t they tell me? Am I that untrustworthy? “Hah, it seems that everyone I care for ends up dead, or hating me or betraying me,” I laughed bitterly at the thought before forcing myself to sit up. I brushed a leaf off of my head and glared coldly up at the sky. “I hope you know what you’re doing StarClan, cause I sure don’t.”

Chapter 3 (Spiritpaw)

“Can you believe it?” Orangepaw peered behind us to stare silently back at the rocky stretch of land we had called home. I followed her gaze and felt my insides twist at the prospect of leaving. For moons now I had despised that dull and tasteless territory but now that we were leaving, I would almost miss it.

“Hurry up you two!” Sharppaw called up ahead. “Unless you snails want to get left behind, I suggest you pick up you pace from wandering to walking like the rest of us.”

“We better hurry or else he’ll get his tail in a knot,” I whispered to Orangepaw and she let out a soft chuckle of agreement.

“Are you actually going to miss this place?” Sharppaw snorted upon us joining him. My tabby friend flicked his tail and despite his harsh tone, I knew he’d miss this land. I could tell from the way his eyes glowed, after all it’s been many moons since the two of us met. “If we stayed any longer I would have died of boredom. Everywhere we looked were rocks, heck we even had to be cautious as to where we stepped lest we get poked by the sharp stones littering the ground.”

“Say whatever you want Sharppaw, but deep down I know you’re going to miss this place as much as us,” in return for that comment, I received a poisonous glare from my orange eyed companion.

“And foxes can fly,” Sharppaw thwacked my head with his long tail which earned a playful growl from me. Leaping away from each other we crouched, ready to pounce when Orangepaw let out an annoyed cough.

“Remember, we’re on a journey,” she reminded. “Stop to play and we’ll be left behind,” to prove her point she casually waved her fluffy tail in the direction of our leaving Clanmates. “And

besides, you probably should conserve your energy… especially you Spiritpaw."

"You're no fun," I pouted as I stood and shook my pelt. For a short while we padded on in silence, walking at the back of the group alongside the rest of the Stolen.

"So Spiritpaw, despite being a fighter learner *and* Nightfrost's apprentice, you still hang with us. Why?" Sharppaw narrowed his eyes and I blinked, taken aback by this sudden question.

"What are you talking about? You're my friends and frankly, even though I'm learning to be a fighter, I'm still a Stolen… I've seen the looks the Clan-born give me. Heck I think the other Stolen are weary of me too."

"Seriously?" Sharppaw frowned and glanced around, sure enough it seemed the crowd of cats avoided us like we had caught green-cough or something.

"On another note, since no one has any idea what to do with me I'm no longer ordered around," I sounded about as positive as I felt, which was practically non-existent. My positivity was long gone now, having flown the coop the minute my claws meet Hailfall's throat.

"Don't worry Spiritpaw, you still have us," Orangepaw smiled warmly at me and comfortingly nuzzled me. "We'll always be your friends, right Sharppaw?"

Sharppaw shifted, he wasn't one to state his feelings but he gave a slight nod and even managed a smile. "Thanks guys," I tapped both of their shoulders with my tail warmly before pulling ahead. "We should try to keep up more."

We were silent once again but it wasn't that awkward silence that left you trying to think of something to say, it was more of a companionable silence. But we had been traveling for a while now, we began the journey at dawn and it was maybe a little after sunhigh. By now I could tell tempers were starting to flare and hunger was settling in. "ShadeClan, we will rest here for a while!"

Nightfrost called from up ahead and, thankfully, our group finally came to a halt. We had taken shelter under a small canopy of trees, after having traveled through the blistering heat of the grassland, saying the shade felt nice would be an understatement.

"Hunters must leave to see if there is anything to catch," Blazeshimmer wove his way through the crowd. It was amazing that the heavily-scarred ginger tabby was still able weave proudly among our Clanmates. He was the oldest of the commanders, and many said it would be any day now until he'll step down. My eyes roamed to his gray muzzle and I couldn't help but agree. "Guards take the Stolen kits to that bush over there and ensure that they are kept safely hidden inside of it. Clan-born queens and kits are to stay in the center of the group; we cannot let ourselves stay vulnerable."

"Well guess that's my que, bye guys," Sharppaw stood and started for the bush Blazeshimmer had pointed out. Already Brownclaw and Treeleaf had escorted the Stolen kits as well as any Stolen queens to shallow shelter that branches managed to create.

"Wait, I'll help you out," I shot to my paws, not used to not doing anything.

"Oh no! You're staying right here and letting me examine your wounds," Orangepaw gently grabbed my tail and tugged me back, forcing me to sit back down. "It's not often we have breaks, so I'm going to take this time to ensure you'll survive this journey."

"If you say so," I frowned crossly but, now that my mind was focused on the wounds I had received, I became conscious of how they hurt and stung.

"Luckily none of them reopened," Orangepaw mused as she gently licked at the wound running across my shoulder. "But since I don't have any herbs I can't ensure that they won't get infected."

"You know Orangepaw, I think I saw some tormintel not far from here," Fawncall had managed to escape from the inner circle of the group, and she smiled warmly at her learner. "If you want, I can take you there."

“Thanks Fawncall,” Orangepaw’s eyes sparkled as she leapt to her paws and eagerly began to follow her only mentor. She paused and glanced back at me. “Don’t move from that spot.”

“Whatever you say, you’re the boss,” I rolled my eyes but pointedly lay down to ensure I didn’t hear an earful from Orangepaw. When they were out of sight I sat back up and began to lick my left paw. I wasn’t used to doing nothing, for moons I had always been on my paws from dawn to dusk and now here I was, relaxing and waiting for food to come. I was contemplating walking around, maybe helping Sharppaw, when I noticed movement coming from a nearby clump of ferns. My ears perked and I sniffed the air, strange cats.

Slowly I stood and started to grow closer, were they friendly or hostile? Or, more importantly, should I inform someone of this. I glanced back and considered alerting Nightfrost, even though he terrified me, when a loud howl filled the air. The next thing I knew I was pinned to the ground with claws digging painfully into my shoulder. My warm sticky blood started to slowly trickle onto the ground underneath as rogues of an assortment of colors, from dull brown to vivid white, blurred past me to attack my Clanmates. This could only end in a blood bath.

Chapter 4 (Spiritpaw)

With a desperate yowl, I kicked the dark gray rogue off of me and scrambled back onto my paws. Looking wildly around, I watched as my Clanmates began fighting. The sounds of battle filled my ears, and for a second a memory flashed into my mind. It was back when I was a kit, when I hadn't been taken… there had been a fight… It was a foggy, broken up memory and as soon as it came it left but it left a feeling of déjà vu behind.

I let out a startled yelp when I, yet again, was tackled to the ground by the same cat from earlier. I glared up at him and bared my teeth, what a nuisance. "Spiritpaw, this is a battle field so pay attention!" someone scolded me coldly before the rogue was ripped off of me by Tigerblaze. The orange, black striped tom's eyes glowed with a wild abandon as he slashed mercilessly at the rogues face, leaving a bloody trail that traveled from one eye to the other. Fighters truly thrived best in battle… I watched in a horror filled silence as the rogue's pleas for mercy were silenced as Tigerblaze's fangs connected with his throat. Tigerblaze pulled away from the now limp body and focused back on me. "Swallow down your emotions Spiritpaw, this is a fight and only the ruthless will survive."

"Very well… Tigerblaze," I forced the words out, while what Tigerblaze said made since I just couldn't agree with it. I shook my head, fight now think about policies later. I whirled away from Tigerblaze and glanced around; despite my Clan being so heavily outnumbered the rogues were dropping like flies. Bodies littered the ground with guts, blood and fur scattered about. My throat tightened just from watching and my stomach churned, threatening to discard any food remains still inside it. I looked away in anguish, my Clan was nothing but a group of murdering thieves that were no better than these rogues.

"You have to fight Spiritpaw," I jerked and quickly glanced to my other side to look at Hollowclaw, his eyes reminded me of

cold stones and blood stained his fur. “I don’t like this massacre either but…” he looked over to where Nightfrost stood. The black tom, after killing yet another rogue, was looking straight at us with narrowed eyes. “You don’t want to anger Nightfrost. If you don’t fight, he’ll doubt your loyalties.”

I gulped, my thoughts returning to the last cat that Nightfrost doubted. Taking in a deep breath I nodded I didn’t want to die and if it meant killing in order to survive, then so be it. Survival to the fittest… if only I could accept that, but I still couldn’t bring myself to take another life. Hailfall’s death still lay heavy inside of my heart and if I killed another cat, I meant sure if I’d be able to live with myself. “Spiritpaw we are the only ones who can change ShadeClan from the inside, the only ones who can change things for the Stolen, but if you’re marked as a traitor they’ll continue to be abused and nothing will change,” Hollowclaw’s sharp yellow gaze bore into mine and I froze. “I can’t alter the Clan’s ways by myself so swallow down your horror and fight.”

Change the Clan… the thought sent shivers rippling down my spine, everyone would be treated as equals and no more pain would be felt. The idea was beautiful, but could we really do that? “I-I’ll fight,” Hollowclaw smiled encouragingly at my decision before turning and leaping back into the fray. “I hope I don’t regret deciding this,” I whispered to myself before turning to face the nearest foe.

He was a skinny rogue, one that should be more focused on getting food than raiding others, with badly groomed and tangled gray fur. “You shouldn’t be here,” I hissed at the cat my eyes narrowing. “You shouldn’t be fighting.”

The rogue growled and swiped at me in response, his thorn sharp claws raking my damaged ear. “This is your last chance, flee now,” I didn’t care how desperate I sounded, but I wanted as least one cat to survive this.

“Never!” the foolishly proud, skinny rogue hissed and launched himself at me. I side stepped him and, as he soared pass, I slammed my paw onto his back. With a loud oomph he crashed to the ground only to struggle back to his paws, shooting a vicious

glare at me.

"I don't want to do this…" contradicting what I just said, I dashed forward and as the rogue thoughtlessly lashed out at me, I ducked and easily scooted underneath him. He reacted a heart-beat too slow for I burst upward, my claws digging into his underbelly as I catapulted him into the air.

Again he thudded against the ground and again he got back onto his legs. Wobbling as he stalked forward, he spat out weakly. "All of you… are… cold-blooded beasts."

"I'm sorry…" I rasped guilt making me shake as I stared into his burning amber eyes. "I have no choice so please… please forgive me," and I charged at him getting close enough so that my claws could pierced his soft throat. He let out a weak cough, blood dripping out of his mouth as I yanked me claws out of him and he collapsed to the ground. In a blink of an eye, a life had been extinguished.

Chapter 5 (Whisppaw)

This is all my fault… I stared down at the sandy-gray cat that lay limp by my paws. None of this should have happened, but of course it did. “Sandpaw, wake up,” I reached out and gently shook my denmate, he didn’t stir. “Come on Sandpaw, wake up!” I knew I sounded desperate and, even though he wasn’t exactly my favorite cat in the world, I didn’t want to be alone. The spinning of the world around me seemed to pick up, and a ringing picked up in my ears. My legs buckled under my weight and I collapsed to the ground. That’s right… I hit my head earlier… It hurts… some rest doesn’t sound too bad…

I opened my wide eyes and looked around the nursery, I was alone… like always. Standing up I padded out of the den, the loneliness weighing heavily inside me. They all feared me, all because I was different. Why couldn’t I have been born normal? I stepped into the sun-high light and blinked as one of my nearby Clanmates froze to glare sharply at me. I was different… and they ostracized me because of it. ***Freak.*** *The nearby golden tabby’s thoughts penetrated my barrier, striking deep into my core.*

My gaze fell down to the ground as I meekly made my way across the clearing, wanting to reach Russetstream’s side without any trouble. She was the only one who accepted me, despite my obvious quirk, and I desperately needed her to shield me from everything. I couldn’t remember how everyone found out I was different, but once they did… nothing was like it was before. But even after she learned about me, my mother always loved me and would never leave my side.

“Oops,” one of my denmates stuck out his paw and, not capable of noticing in time, I tripped and collapsed to the ground. “My bad,” I looked up to stare up at the face of the much older ginger kit that sneered down at me.

I scrambled to my paws and quickly scampered towards Russetstream. ***Yeah that’s right, hurry up and run to mommy… you freak!*** *I risked a glance back at the older kit and my eyes narrowed in*

sorrow as she glared coldly back at me. I held her gaze for a second or two before quickly looking away, why did they hate me?

Maybe it would have been better if Whispkit had never been born. *I froze, my eyes widening. That had been Russetstream's voice… my mother had gotten up and joined Gingerleg, my father. Soon after the thought came to me she spoke and, while I was too far away to hear her, I knew that she had repeated her feelings word for word.*

Without thought I swiftly turned away and barreled out of the camp. No one loved me… no one cares for me! I ran blindly through our territory, not caring about the brambles ripping away my fur or of my small paws stubbing painfully against much larger tree roots. All I cared about was getting away and the next thing I knew… I was plummeting through the air. I let out a startled yowl as I shot off of solid ground and started to tumble over a raging river below.

When I opened my eyes again, I was in the medicine cat's den with healing leaves wrapped around my head. My memories were gone, and with them my power. I was normal, like I always wanted, and all those bad things I had experienced vanished.

I remember it all now, the moon that had disappear from my memories, it came back. But I guess that should be the least of my worries…

Chapter 6 (Spiritpaw)

I jerked awake, my heartbeat thrumming wildly in my throat as I struggled to calm myself down. Rising to shaky paws, I stumbled out from under the outcrop we now sheltered under and forced myself to take calm, steadying breaths. Glancing over my shoulder I frowned in disgust, how could they just act like nothing happened? So many died by our claws, but my Clan just shrugged it off like it was nothing. “Monsters, that’s what they are,” I murmured darkly under my breath and I narrowed my eyes as I took in the sky that teetered between night and day.

Even though we had moved from the small cluster of trees to the rock protrusions, the scent of blood and death still haunted me. I could vividly remember the face of that rogue, of the horrified expression in his eyes as I delivered the killing blow. I clenched my teeth as guilt churned wildly through me, why had I murdered him? *Admit it, deep down you enjoyed his suffering.* The thought, unbidden, flitted into my mind and I let out a strangled growl as I shoved the notion back down into the depths of my mind.

“Spiritpaw,” I jerked recognizing the cold voice to be none other than Nightfrost. I slowly turned to face him, and as I stared at my calm, sleak-furred leader an image popped into my mind. One of him with wild crazed eyes, his fur ruffled and blood as he laughed while tearing his claws through some innocent rogue. “You did well.”

When I didn’t respond he lashed his tail in slight annoyance and add coldly. “Spiritpaw, bury your guilt. You are a part of this Clan and as such, I expect you to become a monster.”

“I-I can’t,” I whispered, I just can’t become like that. I refuse to!

“You can,” Nightfrost rose to his full height and glared down threatingly at me. “And you will.”

I shrank back and my ears flattened fearfully against my skull, but I refused to respond. With an agitated sigh, my black furred leader turned and stalked off. He paused at the entrance to the area under the outcrop and turned back to face me. “When you can no longer carry the burden, tell me.”

“When it’s too much of a burden,” I murmured thoughtfully once Nightfrost had moved out of hearing range, how long could I keep it up? As long as I lived in this Clan that thrived off of others suffering, I would never make it very far. No! I can’t let these kind of thoughts drag me down, that’s what Nightfrost wants. I need to stay strong and one day I’ll be able to change the Clan, but that would never happen if I obediently became a cruel killer like the others. Soon after I heard the sounds of others awakening, it seemed that we would be setting off soon.

“Spiritpaw, don’t tell me you were up all night,” I was joined by Orangepaw, her blue gaze wide with concern as she peered into my eyes. “You need to rest or you’ll never make it on this journey.”

“I tried but…” whenever I closed my eyes the vivid image of the cat I killed, of his horrified expression as I delivered the ending blow, kept popping into my mind. “Orangepaw you have no idea what it’s like to take another’s life. You don’t know how painful it is to live with the memory…” and of the thrill that comes when you hold another’s life in your paws. My breath caught in my throat and I shook my head, no I refuse to think like that.

“You’re right, I don’t know what’s like, but… I’m your friend and as such, I will help you carry your burdens,” Orangepaw smiled sadly at me, and I widened my eyes in surprise. “That is what friends are for, after all. So Spiritpaw, if you ever need to talk to someone I’ll gladly listen.”

“Orangepaw, I’m scared that… that I’ll become a monster,” the words came out as a soft whisper and I flinched inwardly as they continued to spill out unbidden by be. “When I killed Hailfall and that rogue from before I felt appalled but now that I think about it… deep down I enjoyed it… I enjoyed their horror as I…” I stopped, finally gaining control of my mouth, and sat there hunched

and shaking.

"Spiritpaw don't worry, you're a good cat and I know that will never change," Orangepaw comfortingly licked my ear before rubbing her head gently against me. "I'll always be here for you, and I'll always care for you."

We sat like this, with her head resting against my shoulder, before a loud ah-hmm came from behind. "Oh did I just interrupt something," with my heart fluttering in embarrassment, I pulled away from Orangepaw and turned to face Sharppaw. "Didn't realize you two were having a moment there."

"We weren't having a moment!" Orangepaw, her fur fluffed out in discomfort, exclaimed and she glared coldly at her brother.

"Riiiiight," Sharppaw rolled his eyes which earned him another sharp glare from Orangepaw. With a humph she stalked past my brown striped friend, her tail flicking crossly across his muzzle, before disappearing under the outcrop. Padding over to me, Sharppaw gave me a slight smile. "Don't worry, I fully support your relationship with Orangepaw."

"It's not like that, we're just friends," I shuffled my paws as Sharppaw gave me a scrutinizing look.

"Yeah whatever you say," he shrugged nonchalantly and I was pretty sure my friend didn't believe a single word I just said. "Anyways Nightfrost is gathering the Clan together so we'll be leaving shortly."

Sure enough, soon after we left. But even as we, physically, put distance between us and the horrors that had taken place, emotionally they clung to me like an unwanted disease.

Chapter 7 (Whisppaw)

“Ah, you’re finally awake!” I looked over at the cat beside me and frowned, annoyed by how fuzzy my vision was. All I could make out was a wriggling blob of black. “I was beginning to worry but I should have known better, after all the healingfolk treated you.”

“Healingfolk…?” I whispered softly while blinking my eyes in hopes of fixing my vision.

“Mm hmm, you had a pretty bad injury on you head but they fixed it,” the cat’s voice was warm and I imagined he wore a smile as kind as his voice. “Oh by the way, my name is Ink.”

“What a strange name,” I snorted, did twolegs name him that? I had heard they had a very strange naming sense, but to use words that didn’t even exist to name a cat…

“It’s not that strange,” Ink mumbled, he didn’t seem to offended though for he soon went back to talking away enthusiastically. “What’s your name? Oh wait, let me guess… um Maisy? No that doesn’t seem very fitting… what about Cookie or, or Tammy?”

“None of those,” I chuckled at his attempts of matching me with such strange names. “While all of them sound… unique… my name is Whisppaw.”

“Whisppaw? Your twolegs must have some brain damage or something, I mean Whisppaw? That’s even stranger than Ink!”

I rolled my eyes and snorted. “I’m not a kittypet, I’m a Clancat.”

“A Clan cat? The heck’s a Clan cat?” the blob that was Ink shifted in curiosity.

“A Clan-” I froze as someone else’s thoughts spilled

unbidden into my ears. *I wish they'd just shut up.* A grouchy thought from the cat nearby, most likely from some sort of old, prickly tom cat.

Is this the only type of food they have? I will only eat the best brands. A snooty toned thought that made me look up, so there were cats above us as well…

"Hey Whisppaw are you okay?" I jerked, my fur fluffing slightly, as I focused back on Ink.

"I'm fine," I exclaimed quickly, it was back… I was a freak again. My paws started to shake and, not wanting Ink to see, I wrapped my tail over them. Forcing my voice to stay steady and calm, I added. "I'm just not used to being around so many twolegs, and it doesn't help that my vision is still blurry."

"Hmm… well if you say so…" Ink didn't sound too convinced.

"Do you think my vision will stay like this?" I asked in hopes of getting my kittypet friend to focus on something else.

"I don't know, I mean you took a pretty nasty blow to the head…" his voice was dubious and, realizing what he was saying, he quickly corrected himself. "I'm sure in a couple of days everything will be okay, the healingfolk are very skilled at making everything better."

"Alright," I managed a smile before lying down and forcing a yawn. "Anyways, I'm kind of tired so can we talk later?"

"Of course," he fell silent and I closed my eyes, listening silently to the swarm of thoughts that now filled my mind. Everything must have returned thanks to that blow to my head… It's hard to hear myself over all the other voices, I wish they'd just go away. I shifted and covered my ears with my paws, if only that was enough to block them out… *I wonder if Whisppaw is okay.* I froze, and the fur along my spine rippled as I instantly recognized the voice. Sandpaw was here… Despite everything, I felt a smile starting to form, he was alright.

My cage began to shake and my eyes jerked open as the front wall creaked open. I leapt to my paws, hissing, as a twoleg's paw reached inside it. "Whisppaw, don't worry, it's not going to hurt you," Ink's voice was soothing and I shot the black kittypet a helpless look when the paw encircled around me. Where was it going to take me?

Chapter 8 (Juniperpaw)

“Sweetstar isn’t going to like this,” I murmured wearily as I silently slipped out of the camp, followed shortly by Jaded Soul, or just Soul as he preferred. My silver tabby-striped companion let out an annoyed snort while flicking my ear with his furry tail. “Right… I’ll stop worrying,” I sighed.

“Trust me Sweetstar’s anger will be much easier to handle than Master’s,” Soul snorted while surveying the wide open stretch of land that my Clan called him. “Gah! This wind is ridiculous!” he scowled as a powerful gust buffeted us.

“You get used to it eventually,” I shrugged while focusing my eyes on the small patch of woodland at the edge of our territory. “But if you’d like, we could head to the forest first.”

“Better than standing out in the open like this,” Soul flicked his ear crossly before taking the lead while I noted his eager pace. I had assumed that most immortals could care less about the weather, but I guess I was wrong… “So what hints did Master give you? And what are you going to do once you find this cat?”

“Apparently we need to find a brown cat with a white chest and green eyes. Once I find him I have to… I have to kill him,” I felt my throat constrict as I forced the words out, as a medicine cat I was supposed to save lives, not take them.

“Hmm… well I guess that’s not as vague as my first assignment and it’s only the first half that’s difficult. Once we find this cat, it’ll be a cinch,” I frowned and resisted directing a sharp glare at my companion, if that was his way of reassuring me than he should just keep his mouth shut.

“So… you can still remember your first mission?” I wondered, hoping that directing the conversation towards Soul would help settle my racing nerves.

“We remember everything that occurs once we’ve been turned,” my eyes widened and I focused my attention on Soul’s red-ringed green eyes, searching in hopes of a lie. He was telling the truth… so that means my target’s death would remain in my memories forever.

“I… I see,” well this sure made things more complicated. Everything Soul said seemed to only make things worse, with that decided I wisely cut off our conversation. At first the silence was fine, I welcomed it and we easily made it to the patch of forest without a single word being uttered between us. It was when we began to approach the border that the peace started to unnerve me. “What did you have to do for your first mission?”

“Something a lot like what you’re doing, tracking down a cat and killing him,” Soul explained simply, his gaze seemed distant almost like his mind was wandering elsewhere.

“What happens if you decide not to complete this mission?” the question that was often surfacing in my mind, and one that I feared to hear the answer. Still I had to know, I needed to know if killing this innocent stranger could be avoided.

“Don’t even consider it!” Soul snapped and I reeled in surprise at the glint of burning anger that suddenly surfaced into his eyes. He paused in his curt stride and closed his eyes, when he opened them they were yet again emotionless and cold. “If you disobey Master, he will punish you until you finally comply to his demands. Words cannot describe the pain he puts you through.”

What have I gotten myself into? The question that kept coming back resurfaced into my mind and I felt my tail start to droop. I hadn’t even been immortal for a month and I already regretted agreeing to this. It didn’t help that I lost half my sight and half my hearing from that ridiculous agreement I made with Master. While it didn’t really affect me much in my daily life, the fact that someone could stand next to me and I wouldn’t know makes things quite stressful.

“Look there’s a rogue over there, why don’t you go ask him about your target,” Soul waved his tail to direct my attention

towards a silver-gray tom who seemed to have a squint in his left eye. I was about to protest, having never spoken to a rogue in my life, when Soul roughly nudged me towards him.

As I stumbled closer to him, the rogue froze and directed his sharp orange glare towards me. “Who are you?” he snarled, his fur starting to bristle aggressively.

“W-wait I don’t wish to fight,” I struggled to keep my voice from shaking as I struggled to regain my composure. “I’m looking for someone a um… brown cat with a white chest. Oh and this cat also has green eyes.”

The rogue tilted his head slightly as he pondered over the description. “Sorry, never saw someone like that. I heard that there’s going to be a gathering today, why don’t you go there and see if you can find him.”

“A gathering?” I echoed, could a large group of rogues even meet in peace? Without laws to bind these cats, weren’t they just wild beasts who often fought with each other for territory and prey.

“That’s right, I’ll take you to the place if you want,” the rogue then glanced impatiently up at the sky. “It’ll be starting soon, so we best be going.”

“Thank you, that’ll be really helpful,” I managed a smile and, once the rogue turned away, I felt my shoulders sage in relief. It was daunting to speak with non-Clan cats, how was I going to manage a whole assembly of them?

“You did great Juniperpaw,” Soul meowed softly into my good ear, which made me jerk in surprise. “Don’t worry, you’ll get used to talking with strangers as time passes.”

“Of course I will,” I mumbled icily, I did have an eternity after all. After that, we didn’t bother to say anything as the rogue led us deeper into the forest. The scraggly trees were slowly replaced by large, sturdy oaks, beeches and elms.

“This is the place,” the rogue suddenly stopped while gently

pawing aside a clump of ferns to reveal a large clearing. I let out a soft gasp, there were so many cats! I had thought SilverClan was large but, upon seeing the contingent of rogues made my Clan seem puny in comparison. “Ask around, I’m sure at least one cat is bound to know who you’re looking for.”

“Ah… right thanks,” I dipped my head in gratitude before nervously making my way towards the crowd. Soul was close beside me and, for a change, I was relieved to have him by my side.

For a while I silently slipped through the throng of cats, trying desperately to work up my courage in order to talk with one of them. They all seemed so intimidating… but before I could say a word to any of the rogues, a loud yowl that demanded complete silence reverberated through the clearing.

Instantly, the crowd grew silent and eyes were directed towards a single tannish-brown tom cat that was now climbing up one of the trees at the edge of the clearing. When his paws grasped the first branch he stopped and turned to face us. “Our leader is, unfortunately, incapable of meeting with you at the moment,” this was met with disapproving murmurs from the rogues. Ignoring this, the tom continued. “But everything I say beyond this point are his words… *We have grown to thrice as much since our last meeting. Once I return from my journey, we will lay siege on the group that is called SilverClan. No more will we allow them to selfishly hog their prey rich lands! Upon my return, we will chase these cats off the land which is rightfully ours.* That is what our leader said, so until the day he returns continue to spread the word of our group in order for us to grow.”

“This is awful,” a dismayed whisper escaped from me and I quickly turned to leave. With Soul trailing after me, I shot out of the clearing and tore wildly through the forest. I need to warn them! I can’t let SilverClan be destroyed!

Chapter 9 (Juniperpaw)

“So are you going to tell Sweetstar about the rogues?” Soul wondered as we arrived to the camp’s entrance. “Just telling her right away would be dangerous.”

“Of course I am… are you implying I shouldn’t? That I should just let my Clan parish?” I shot Soul a cold look before turning away from him. “If that’s what you’re saying, then sorry but I can’t do that.”

“No that’s not what I’m saying at all,” Soul let out an exasperated sigh and I risked a glance over at him as he lashed his tail in annoyance. “I’m saying that, if you don’t plan out a well thought up story before telling Sweetstar not only will she not believe you, but she could become suspicious of your judgment.”

“Then what do you suggest I do? Lie and deceive my Clan leader?” I frowned while glowering skeptically at the Cursed cat before me. I know it was the most logical way to go about this but still, the thought of lying to Sweetstar just felt wrong.

“What else can you do? Tell the truth?” Soul snorted while sending me a look, he added. “Oh hey Sweetstar while I was out searching for the cat I’m supposed to *assassinate*, as per command by a dark overlord that I may or may not have pledged eternal allegiance to, I happened upon a group of rogues that are planning on slaughtering us all… yeah that’ll go over so well.”

Terribly sorry for taking ages upon ages to post this but winter has just been so taxing. I just can't stand the cold and it's been draining the little energy I have. Hopefully the next chapter I post won't take as long as this one but I have no guarantees...

Chapter 10 (Jadepaw)

It was nice to finally be away from the camp. Slipping between a clump of ferns, I arrived to a small clearing filled with sunlight. This was my favorite spot in the forest, the warm light calming my nerves and the silence was much needed. Sprawling out against the grassy land, I closed my eyes and gladly soaked up the sunshine. I'm not sure how much time passed but when I heard the grass rustling in front of me, I cracked open my eyes and winced as I saw a pair of yellow paws stop in front of me. "Hey Yellowpaw, lovely weather we're having," I looked up to stare into my sister's sightless eyes, which have narrowed in annoyance.

"You're supposed to be resting properly in the camp," she frowned when I let out a sigh.

"Yeah that's the thing, I think I was starting to get cabin fever," Yellowpaw wouldn't understand, she always enjoyed staying at the camp and being around the others. To me, staying back at the camp made me feel imprisoned.

"Fine, next time you have an urge to leave camp let me know," Yellowpaw's whiskers twitched slightly, a sign that she was thinking. "I'll let you come herb gathering with me every so often."

I studied Yellowpaw warily, ever since the time I ran away she never really showed me much kindness. "Okay, I guess that can work."

"Good, now come on there's an herb I need," Yellowpaw abruptly turned away and I was left scrambling after her. We didn't speak as we walked, and I made sure to keep a slight distance between us. Where had our friendship gone? "Alright, this is what I need," Yellowpaw stopped by a clump bright red flowers. "These flowers are poppies, once they dry out I'll be able to harvest the seeds," she explained while gently biting the stems. Two flowers collapsed to the ground and she gestured for me to pick one up. Before I could move, Yellowpaw suddenly turned her gaze towards

me. There was a sort of look on her face, almost like she was unsure, before she spoke. “I think I understand why you wanted to leave… You aren’t meant to be in a Clan,” she smiled sadly before turning away. “I forgive you Jadepaw, and I’m sorry for taking so long to realize this. One day, you’re going to leave and that makes me fearful…” Yellowpaw trailed off and she pawed at the ground. “Please when you do leave, at least say good-bye.”

“I can do that…” unsure as to what else to say I padded past Yellowpaw in order to pick up the flower. Yellowpaw smiled warmly at me before she picked up the other flower. We began to head back to camp, my tail resting slightly on her shoulder to help her navigate the woods, when I heard a scared wail. Glancing over at Yellowpaw, I confirmed that the cry hadn’t been my imagination. Her ears swerved and she abruptly changed direction, most likely heading towards the cries.

We wove past some brambles and then I spotted three small kits huddled together. They looked hardly a moon old and they all had silver stripes marked with black stripes. The only differences between the three was that they all had different eye colors. One had blue eyes, another green and the third had amber. I started to approach them when Yellowpaw held up her tail to signal for me to stop. Putting down her flower she whispered softly. “Something’s coming.”

Setting down the flower I carried I wondered aloud. “What is it?”

“I don’t know,” Yellowpaw frowned as she angled her ears to catch some sound I couldn’t hear. Her nose wrinkled as she caught a disgusting scent and she let out a soft growl. “Whatever it is, it’s loud.”

We didn’t have to wait long before we saw a giant black head with stunning white heads pop out from behind some ferns. Its large nose was twitching wildly and its small black eyes focused on the three kits. “A badger,” I hissed, recalling the stories of them I heard. “It probably heard the kits and came to see if they’d be easy prey.”

“What should we do?”

“I’ll distract it, you get the kits out of here,” I instructed and, before Yellowpaw could protest, I dashed out to face it. Putting myself between the kits and the badger I let out a growl. Glancing over at the terrified kits I exclaimed. “Hurry over to Yellowpaw, she’ll help you.”

As the kits tumbled on shaking legs towards my sister, I launched myself at the much larger animal. I swatted at its large clumsy paws before leaping away as it tried to swipe me away. The diversion worked, Yellowpaw was herding the kits away and the badger’s attention was solely on me. I swatted at it one last time before turning and dashing away, leading the badger farther from the others.

For a big brute, the thing was rather fast. It was easily able to keep up with me and when I glanced over my shoulder, I noticed it was even gaining ground. I skidded to a halt taking in swift shallow gasps, since it hurt to breathe too deeply, and again faced the badger. What should I do now? Yellowpaw and the kits are probably safe now, but there was no way I could get away from this badger.

Crouching low to the ground, I unsheathed my claws and arched my back. I’ll have to fight, maybe I’ll be able to hold on long enough for help to come. With a yowl, I leapt upwards. I landed squarely on its back while digging my claws into its thick course fur. It easily shook me off and as I landed clumsily back onto the ground, it lashed out at me. Its claws ripped across my shoulder sending me tumbling across the ground. Coming to a halt, I lay winded and the badger took this as its chance.

The strike came quickly. Its claws crashed down on me. My already broken ribs cracked against the pressure and my vision blurred from the burning pain. Its hurts… hurts so much…

Chapter 11 (Spiritpaw)

"My paws hurt!"

"I'm tired!"

"Are we there yet?"

"Can we take a break?"

"I want something to eat!"

"Will they ever shut up?" Sharppaw hissed under his breath while lashing his tail in annoyance and shooting a dark glare at the four wailing Clan-Born kits. "A blessed moment of silence is all I ask."

I flicked my ear in agreement while giving the complaining kits an unsympathetic look. I just couldn't bring myself to care for those spoiled brats. Sadly it wasn't much of a surprise when Nightfrost back tracked to join the kits. He murmured something to them before calling out. "Oceansplash, Redspark, Blackfang and Treefall, come here!" by now the group had stopped to watch as the four Stolen padded up to our leader, their heads bowed respectfully. "We still have a long way to go before we can rest, I want you to carry these four until then."

"Of course Nightfrost," Oceansplash murmured and I watched as she silently glanced over at her own kits, the three of which looked just as exhausted as the Clan-Born.

Nightfrost snorted his approval before returning to the front of the group. "I'll keep an eye on your kits," I exclaimed to Oceansplash who had now picked up a much more satisfied Flashkit. Her eyes gleamed her relief and she nodded slightly as I padded past her and joined the three kits.

"Spiritpaw," I looked down at Mintkit, whose frosty blue-

green eyes gleamed with concern as he stared at Dustkit. Her face was set with determination as her small legs struggled to keep up with Venomkit. “I’m worried about Dustkit, do you think you could help her?”

“Of course,” I smiled down at Mintkit in order to hide my frustration. These kits deserved kindness just as much as the others.

“I don’t need help!” Dustkit protested and she frowned stubbornly back at me. “I can take care of myself.”

“Of course you can, but there’s nothing wrong with having you having help from time to time,” I responded while bounding over to her and scooping her up, despite her protests. Talking around the squirming kit I instructed Orangepaw and Sharppaw. “Carry Mintkit and Venomkit, alright?”

They nodded and headed towards Dustkit’s brothers. So with the three of us carrying a kit each, we continued to walk in silence. I wonder what it’d be like to live in a normal Clan… they never had to travel like this I’d bet. Everyone would support each other and there would be no prejudice among the members. An average Clan sounded just like an unreachable utopia.

“You guys are a traveling kit thief Clan aren’t you,” our group froze as an unknown cat spoke, I glanced around and finally found a slim black tom with blue eyes standing casually on a tall rock not too far from us. Agilely leaping down, he padded confidently up to Nightfrost. “If you want, I can show you guys to a nearby Hideout.”

Nightfrost narrowed his eyes down at the slightly shorter cat as he considered the offer. “Hollynight and Spiritpaw will accompany you, we’ll wait here for their return. If, by sun-high tomorrow they aren’t back, we will presume it is a trap and will continue without them.”

“If that is what you desire,” the black cat who, with a closer look, had small white flecks running along his spine smiled. “Now then, which of you are Hollynight and Spiritpaw.”

Placing Dustkit down, I started forward. “Be careful Spiritpaw,” I glanced over my shoulder at Orangepaw. Her eyes gleamed with worry and it was clear she wished to accompany us.

“Don’t worry I’ll be fine,” I tapped Orangepaw’s shoulder reassuringly before making my way to the unknown cat. Hollynight was already waiting impatiently beside him and she shot me a glare.

“Well then let’s get going,” the tom, oblivious to the Hollynight’s hostility, declared. He took the lead as he circled around the rock. Hollynight was close behind and, after a moment’s hesitation, I followed.

“You guys probably want to know my name,” the blue eyed cat meowed. “I’m Hailstrike, a BrambleClan thief.”

“You’re a part of BrambleClan!” Hollynight gasped, her jaw dropped and her eyes widened in amazement.

“I take it you’ve heard of us before.”

“Are you kidding?! BrambleClan is only the most infamous thief Clan ever founded!” Hollynight gushed, she was all but drooling as she gazed admiringly at Hailstrike.

I snorted and rolled my eyes, what was so great about BrambleClan? They were practically exactly like ShadeClan only bigger. I was much more interested as to what a Hideout was. “Hailstrike can you tell me about Hideouts? What exactly is a Hideout?”

“You’ve never heard of one before?” Hailstrike looked at me in surprise before smiling. “Oh I get it, this must be your first journey. Ah how that brings back memories…” he paused and his eyes grew distant for a moment or two before he continued, “you see a Hideout is pretty much a rest stop for traveling thieves. Since we thieves often have to travel far distances to reach our targets, these bases were formed to make our lives easier. As long as you’re a thief, a Hideout will gladly welcome you into their midst.”

“How did the Hideouts form?”

“Well… no one really knows, they kind of just started popping up. Many speculate that certain rogue camps and Clans decided that, in order to prevent themselves from being attacked, they would open both their land and their camps to us. That would then give us a place to rest while they can live without fear of attack. It’s a win-win for both sides.”

“I guess that makes sense…” still the thought of Clan’s willingly giving up their independence made my insides squirm with discomfort. “Say how far is this Hideout anyways?”

“Hmm… we should get there by nightfall,” Hailstrike looked up at the sky, judging the sun’s position. “So… maybe two redwood lengths.”

“That’s not too far,” I mused aloud, still I was starting to grow worried about my wounds. They were starting to sting and I’m fairly certain the one on my shoulder had reopened. Licking at it lightly I could taste the distinct flavor of blood and frowned. I should be able to make it to the Hideout…

“So has your group ran into any troubles lately?” our guide wondered while gazing thoughtfully at my wounds.

“Thankfully we’ve been pretty lucky,” Hollynight responded. “All we encountered so far was a group of half starved rogues.”

“That’s good, when you’re on a journey you want to avoid fighting as much as possible.”

“Of course, I was even a little reluctant to fight the rogues knowing we’d get some unnecessary injuries,” I stifled a snort, Hollynight had been one of the first to leap into battle… what a hypocrite. After the comment I completely zoned out the conversation the two held, seeing that it would probably be nothing but Hollynight lying to attempt to impress the BrambleClan cat.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Well looks like we’re here,” we had arrived just as the moon rose into the sky and it was a relief to hear those words.

“Oh Hailstrike who are these two?” a golden she-cat with a black underbelly meowed as she joined us. Her friendly blue eyes appraised the two of us and she frowned as she noticed my wounded shoulder, which had started bleeding again.

“These are Hollynight and Spiritpaw, they’re members of a ShadeClan,” Hailstrike responded. To us he explained. “This is Lionshade, she’s our Clan’s top healer.”

“Now then, Spiritpaw come with me,” the she-cat was still staring agitatedly at my wound.

“Nightfrost said we had to return after ensuring this wasn’t a trap,” Hollynight protested while sending me a withering glare.

“I’m sure Nightfrost will understand Spiritpaw staying here,” Lionshade huffed while padding up to me. She began to herd me towards the Hideout entrance before pausing and saying. “Just let him know that Lionshade is with him.”

“Does Nightfrost know you or something?” I looked at the healer with interest, what kind of relationship did they have?

“What he never told you? You see Nightfrost used to be a member of BrambleClan. Ever since he was a kit he had such high ambitions so it wasn’t much of a surprise when he decided to leave and start his own Clan.”

“Why did he leave? Couldn’t he have just waited until he became BrambleClan’s leader?”

“Of course not,” Lionshade laughed. “Nightfrost was always so impatient, he figured why go through the hassle of going through a power struggle when he could just make his own Clan. It doesn’t help that his brother was already close to becoming leader.”

“Who is Nightfrost’s brother?”

“Thornscar, BrambleClan’s current leader. Now, enough

with the chit-chat let's go and get your wound looked at."

Chapter 12 (Juniperpaw)

“I need some time to think this over,” Sweetstar sighed and I took that as I sign to leave. Dipping my head I turned and slowly slunk out of the den. I hope I made the vision’s description realistic enough. I had never had a dream from StarClan so I didn’t really know too much about it but from what Softheart had told me, I knew that they were rather cryptic.

“Sweetstar believes me… she has to,” I murmured to myself as I hurried across the clearing and returned to my den. Now I should concentrate on work, what good would it do if all I did was fret about it… I took out some of the herbs to sort out the older ones but a few heart beats later I was pacing the confines of my den. “How will she react? Will she declare war on the rogues? Surely not. Our Clan isn’t big enough to face that many cats…” I froze when I noticed Bird standing casually by the den entrance.

“Hope I’m not interrupting anything,” he greeted before strolling up to me. “I heard from Soul about what you found… you shouldn’t worry too much.”

“Easy for you to say,” I sighed before a brilliant idea popped into my mind. “Bird come herb gathering with me! We could gather some herbs to help with wounds, I’m sure they’ll come in handy eventually.”

“Well if it’ll help you calm down, then sure,” I shot Bird a smile of relief before hurrying past him.

“Are you going herb gathering?” Foxhowl, the current lookout stationed by the entrance, asked me as I approached the camp exit. “Remember, it’s dangerous if you go alone.”

“Don’t worry Bird’ll be with me,” I replied to the shaggy ginger cat before heading past him. That’s right, everyone still thinks I have that illness. I wonder how they’d react if they ever found out… not like I’ll ever let them find out

“So what herbs do you need?” I practically jumped out of my fur as Bird came up from behind. I wish he’d stop sneaking up on me like that.

“Oh um uh… we need dock leaves and goldenrod,” with Bird following, I made my way across the moorland. I wasn’t entirely sure where the goldenrod was but the dock leaves were pretty easy to find. At the edge of the patch of forest, hidden among a bunch of ferns, was a clump of dock. It was one of the few herbs Softheart had shown me before she died.

“Are you sure you know where the goldenrod is?” Bird meowed around the dock leaves he carried and resisted letting out a sigh. I had hoped we would find them if we just wondered around. “If you don’t, maybe you should get Night to help you. She used to be a healer before she became cursed.”

“Seriously?” in my shock I practically spat out all the leaves.

“Ah but she doesn’t like to bring up the past so maybe you should wait until she comes to you,” Bird added and I let out a sigh. Of course I understood why she wouldn’t want to bring up the past, it was probably painful for her to remember after all, but I still wanted to learn as soon as possible.

“By the way, what do you think about the rogues?” I gathered up the scattered dock leaves.

“I think if we can locate and take out the leader, the rogues will leave us alone.”

“But how will we know who the leader is? When I was there, the leader was away at the time.”

“Then someone needs to infiltrate their ranks, gain their trust and then kill their leader,” he made it sound so simple. Well maybe it was, for an immortal… Wait don’t tell me he wants us to that! Seeing the realization in my gaze he smiled and nodded. “Who better for the job than a couple of cursed. Besides if you decide to do this, most likely you’ll be able to locate your target.”

I froze as he brought up my mission. Due to the threat towards my Clan I had completely forgotten about it. “Alright… I’ll spy on them. Just can you accompany me, I don’t think I’ll be able to do it alone.”

“Of course,” Bird smiled. “Let’s drop off these dock leaves and head over there now.”

Chapter 13 (Juniperpaw)

"This is the rogue's camp? I thought it would be busier than this," Bird murmured into my ear upon passing the clump of undergrowth lining the clearing that the rogue's called their camp.

"The majority probably don't live here," I answered in return, rogues preferred a more solitary life than one with comrades. "In any case, we need to hurry and find the second in command."

"So what does he look like?" my ginger-and-black companion asked while scanning the few rogues hanging about.

"He's tannish brown with amber eyes."

"Ah! There he is," Bird signaled towards the proud cat, who fit the description perfectly, sitting on a low tree root. His ears perked as his stern gaze landed on us. He tilted his head slightly, a come here gesture.

"You do the speaking, this is perfect practice for you," Bird murmured to me. "What's with that face? I'll be right by your side, so don't worry," he added upon seeing my distraught expression.

"I-I'll try," I murmured, taking in a deep breath I started towards him.

"I've never seen your face before, who are you and state your business here!" I flinched at his cold, hostile tone.

"W-w-well... I-I'm Juniper..." I trailed off while looking down nervously. I froze when Bird's tail tapped my shoulder reassuringly. Looking back at him, he gave me an encouraging smile. "I am Juniperpaw, the medicine cat of SilverClan."

"What's a SilverClan cat doing here," the tannish cat snarled while his hackles began to rise.

"I wish to join... You see my Clan is pathetically weak and well, I've grown sick of it. The only problem is that I can't leave, for all my life I have only known the moorland. There is no way I could possibly survive in the forest so when I heard that a group of rogues wish to terminate SilverClan I thought this would be a great opportunity," I paused to let this sink in before continuing. "So I come to offer you my service as a medicine cat, I can heal the injured and ill. But, at the same time, due to my rank in the Clan I can also gather important information that I can then divulge to you."

"Hmm... interesting," the rogue murmured, his eyes narrowing as he thought this over. "Very well I shall allow you to join... I take it your companion wishes to join as well."

"Yes that's right."

"Today has been a good day," the cat grinned, a grin full of chilling darkness. "I welcome the two of you into our assembly, and may we all gain from this new alliance."

Chapter 14 (Whisppaw)

"Whisppaw..." a soft whisper broke through the foggy darkness that surrounded Whisppaw's mind. She let out a soft groan and rolled over, was it already time for training? But for some reason her nest was softer than usual, it reminded her of the soft bedding back in the nursery. It made it impeccably difficult to get up... Her eyes jerked open as realization dawned on her, she wasn't back in LightClan. Sitting up she looked around, her pale blue eyes wild and frantic, she needed to find Sandpaw. Together they could find a way back to LightClan... She blinked a couple of times and frowned, everything was still blurry. Rubbing her eyes with her paw, she tried again. Still blurry.

"Great you're up!" the black blob that was Ink purred, he shifted a bit and as he came closer, she was able to make out some details. He wasn't fully black, his chest and muzzle seemed to be a shade a dark shade of gray and his paws were pure white. His eyes, which were two blurry spots of green, blinked. "Is your vision still bad?"

"Mmm..." Whisppaw looked away and sighed, what if this was permanent? She would only be a hindrance to the Clan if it was. Not only that, but Ink's thoughts flitted into her mind like wandering butterflies. He had no barriers whatsoever, and it seemed he had no reason to have any either. His thoughts were cheery and friendly, although they had some worry in them. Such as whether his new friend's eyes would get better, or when the twolegs would give them their morning meal. "Don't worry too much, I'm sure it'll get better sooner or later," the small she-cat with stripes the color of flames meowed before standing up. Yes she needed to be more concerned about the minor detail of being able to read minds. If her Clan found out that the ability had returned, she'd be an outcast again... She didn't want that.

"Hey I know, how about I show you around the den! It's kind of small compared to the wild, but it's super warm during the

cold season and there's always plenty of nice places to sleep."

"Thanks for the offer but I don't think I'll be staying for very long," Whisppaw murmured.

"Oh come now, there's no way I'll let you leave with your eyes like they are!" Ink protested and his blurry figure seemed to grow, most likely having fluffed out his fur.

The brightly striped apprentice studied the kittypet thoughtfully, no matter how many of his thoughts filled her mind, none of them held any deceit. It was strange, as a kit all she could remember were thoughts filled with hate and lies. It had deeply rattled her. Yet here, standing before her, was a genuinely innocent and friendly cat. "Alright..." Whisppaw sighed, she couldn't bear to hurt this naive cat's feelings. "Go ahead and show me around."

Most likely beaming a radiant smile of happiness, the blob that was Ink nodded excitedly. "Alright, we'll start with the upper floor. It's my favorite part in the house, since there's so many windows and places to hide."

As he chattered on, Whisppaw zoned him out. She was more concerned about everything all around her. Brightly colored stones that, upon being touched had a unique texture to them, and the tannish grass underneath her paws felt so much different than what she was used to. Oh how she wished her vision was clearer, then maybe she could make out more of this strange twoleg world. "Of course, I'd love to see your favorite spot," she meowed when the friendly kittypet tom had stopped talking.

"How'd you know I was going to ask that!?"

"A um... well er... It was just a hunch... I guess..." she shifted her gaze from Ink's intense stare towards the pale colored walls. She was never very good at lying...

"Oh I see," his tone was nonchalant but she could feel the doubt inside him. Nice going Whisppaw. She scolded herself silently, I need to be more careful or he'll find out. "Say Whisppaw, can you tell me about the Clans? And why did you end up so far

away from them anyways?"

"It'll take some time to explain everything," she meowed softly, her pale blue eyes studying him to ensure he voiced the question aloud.

"Don't worry we have plenty of time," Ink purred while hoping up some steps. "And I know the perfect spot to hold long conversations."

She nodded and tentatively followed him up the steps, marveling at the fact that each one was evenly spaced. They were much different from the jagged and unsteady stone steps that could be found throughout LightClan's territory. Upon reach the top of the flight of stairs, we turned a corner and entered a rather bright cave. Resting beside a clear opening in the cave wall was a bright blue stone which Ink hopped up onto. I leapt up beside him and sat down on the oddly squishy stone. "I never really talk about Clan life to strangers so um... how about you ask the questions and I'll answer to the best I can."

"Alright," Ink nodded and at once billions of questions pounded relentlessly at Whisppaw's mind. To say the least, she was definitely starting to get a head ache. "Here's one... do you live with twolegs?"

"Heck no," she responded quickly while curling her lip back in disgust just at the thought. "We don't rely on twolegs to keep ourselves fed."

"Than what do the elderly cats or the ones too young to hunt do? You just don't leave them to starve do you?"

"We aren't barbarians," she snorted and rolled her eyes at Ink's envision of the Clan. In his mind he imagined a bunch of skinny, scruffy cats fighting over a scrap of mouse. "The fit and strong go out hunting for those incapable themselves. We always ensure that the elderly and the queens are kept fed. We also make sure that the sick are cared for until they're capable of hunting for themselves again."

A wild river of relief ran through Ink and she felt the tension in him slowly wash away. "That's good, I just hate the thought of the strong never caring for the weak. It makes me sick... So are all Clans like yours?"

"Well... most are... There are a few however that stray from the StarClan's path. These cats belong to thief Clans. They take young kits from Clans and force them to follow their ways. They are truly a group of despicable fox-hearts," the flame striped she-cat curled her lips in disgust and she lashed her tail angrily. "My Clan took it upon ourselves to stop them and to care for all kits stolen by them."

"Your Clan sounds amazing! Do you try to find the rescued kits' former Clan or do you usually keep them yourselves?"

"It depends. We often try to search for their Clan, especially if the kit can remember the name of their former Clan before being stolen. However, if we can't find the Clan than we'll either keep them or take them to..." she trailed off as she focused on Ink, who was now giving her a strange look. Crap! Had she read his mind again?

"Whisppaw, are you special? There's no way you could have guessed what I was going to say again," he frowned suspiciously at her and she shifted her paws nervously, what should she say? She couldn't just go and admit to being able to read his mind... She didn't want to be rejected. Never again. But Ink was so much different than any Clan cat. His thoughts were so naïve and innocent, so maybe he'd accept her? What should she do? Should she take a risk and tell him? Studying him she let out a sigh, if he did accept her it would help ease the burden. "Don't be too surprised when I tell you this... alright?"

Ink nodded, his eyes gleaming with a newfound seriousness. Okay, here goes! "Ink, as you guessed I am special... I... I can read minds."

His jaw dropped and for a second his thoughts froze as a chilling shock settled in. He blinked a couple of times. So, even though he had his suspicions, he hadn't been fully prepared to learn

the truth... "So okay... you can read minds... can um... all Clans cats do that?" the fact that he was trying to make a normal conversation despite his astonishment almost amused Whisppaw.

"Ink why are you so surprised, didn't you already guess I could read minds?" her whiskers twitched before she answered his question. "Sadly I'm the only one. Everyone else is just like you, normal."

"Well I did have my suspicions but I didn't expect you to admit it so suddenly," Ink shrugged while growing embarrassed. The fact that he didn't hate her upon her sudden revelation, and was actually self-conscious about his shocked reaction, relieved her. "So did your Clan accept you for who you are? Do they even know about your abilities?" when she didn't respond, Ink quickly added. "Sorry if I asked something impersonal, you don't have to tell my if you don't want to!"

"No it's okay..." she trailed off as the newly awakened memories resurfaced. Their rejection had hurt her, scarred her for the rest of her life. "They couldn't handle the fact that I was different. Plus they were afraid that I'd read their secrets. After all everyone has a secret to keep and the fact that I could just easily peek into their mind and unbury that secret unnerved them. "

"Oh..." Ink tilted his head thinking this over. "Well I don't mind if you know my secrets! And I don't think you're the kind of cat who'd go and tell secrets you've been entrusted with."

The sincerity of his comment left Whisppaw almost as surprised as Ink was upon learning of her powers. She had never expected anyone to accept her, yet here stood one who still cared for her even after learning the truth. He might be the only one who'll ever truly accept me...

"Hey Whisppaw what if you try to train your powers? I mean you probably she get to know them better. Like how far do they reach or can you turn them on and off? What if, through training, you can make them stronger? Will you eventually be able to, not only hear another's thoughts but send your own thoughts to them?"

"And you want to help me with this?" it was still hard to believe that Ink actually wanted to help her. She had never met anyone capable of lying in their own thoughts. Smiling she added. "Alright, I'll accept your help."

Chapter 15 (Wisppaw)

"I can still hear you!" the she-cat with stripes the color of flames called out to the blurry black figure who now stood on the opposite side of the twoleg garden. Currently the two were working on finding out the limits of her abilities before they focused on improving her control over them. "Try moving back another fox length."

Alright. Her companion having come to terms with the she-cat's strange ability, was more than eager to speak to her through the mental connection shared between their two minds. Taking a couple of more steps back, he stopped upon reaching the silver meshed fence that marked the end of Ink's yard and the beginning of another. That's when silence befell upon Wisppaw. "I can't hear them... Ink I can't hear you!" For the first time since her powers resurfaced, her mind heard only her own thoughts.

"So your limit is two fox lengths," the black blob mused aloud before walking back into her range. *Do you think that's the case on all sides? Is it an even circle or do you think it might be like an oval or some other shape?*

"I don't know..." it was an excellent question, and one she had no answer for. Honestly, she had no clue about anything when it came to her powers. As a kit, she was more focused on the fact that everyone hated her for being different than actually trying to harness this strange birth defect.

There's so much you need to figure out. Like if you can send your own thoughts to others, or is it limited to just hearing thoughts. Maybe if you worked hard enough to strengthen your own mind, you'd be able to create a barrier to block out others. He lashed his tail in frustration, there was just so much they needed to work out. Wisppaw can't stay here forever, working on improving her control. She had to find this Sandpaw guy and return to the Clans.

"Thanks for your concern, Ink but I'm sure I'll be able to work

everything out somehow," of course it would be difficult to train by herself. She wasn't about to go out of her way and tell her Clan about this, not after the first time they rejected her. She didn't exactly wish to go through that suffering all over again.

"Still, you'll be all alone won't you. You aren't going to tell anyone else are you?" Ink let out a sigh before sitting down. *If only I could come with her... But I don't want to leave my house folk.*

"Oh, hey, hey you're new aren't you!" someone called out from behind, and the Clan cat turned to look up at a kittypet precariously balancing on the fence. She was a large golden-tan blob, which meant she either was impeccably well-fed or she had an incredible amount of fluffy fur. "Where'd you come from?" *It's nice to have another she-cat around. I'm sick of being surrounded by obnoxious tom cats.*

"Great another cat," another cat jumped up onto the fence, he was a pale ginger blob that seemed to have darker stripes. *If she's as loud and obnoxious as Muffin, I'm seriously going to file a complaint to my house folk.*

"Ah... I'm from LightClan," she answered, focusing her gaze towards the she-cat whom she presumed to be Muffin.

"LightClan? Oh a Clan cat! I remember we once had a neighbor from a Clan. Oh what was it... Um I think it was DawnClan? No maybe StreamClan? FrogClan? It was a while ago so I can't quite remember! Anyways, he never really spoke to much. He was so stoic and unfriendly. Are all Clan cats like that? Oh I sure hope you aren't! I've been dying to have another cat to talk to. I mean Ink isn't too bad, he's super friendly, but I can't go ahead and talk about she-cat things with a tom, now can I," the kittypet talked as soon as her thoughts flitted into her mind, a constant and nonstop chatter that almost gave Wisppaw a headache.

Will she ever shut up? I'm so sick of this. The unfriendly tabby beside her let out an annoyed snort. "Hey Muffin, maybe you should give her a chance to talk. Sounds like a great idea, doesn't it?"

"Ah! You're right! Sorry about that. Wow you know what, I don't

even know your name now do I? So what is it? It's probably super strange isn't it. That Clan cat from before had a strange name too. I think it was Shardclaw or something? I wonder if he was all grumpy because he was given such a name. I mean I wouldn't want a name like, that's for sure. Ah I hope I'm not insulting you or-" she was abruptly cut off when the ginger tabby slapped his tail across her muzzle.

"Go on, what's your name?" he meowed while sending a sharp glare at Muffin to ensure she stayed quiet.

"My name is Wisppaw..." she shifted slightly, mind still reeling from the constant chatter from the fluffy kittypet. "What's yours?"

"This is Muffin," she looked about ready to open her mouth to let out a steady stream of pointless chatter but she was silenced by a quick glare from her companion. "And my name is Tabby."

"Nice to meet you," she dipped her head in greeting while trying to ignore Muffin's loud thoughts. She's so loud, probably the loudest Wisppaw had ever met.

"Say, say can I ask you about Clan life? Oh I'm just so curious! Shardclaw would never answer any of my questions, it's a miracle I even managed to figure out his now. So please tell me everything you can. Like do you live with twolegs? I guess you don't, since you're so scrawny. No twoleg would let their cat end up looking like you. So if you don't live with twolegs, where do you live? What's the place like? How do you survive during winter? What's the reason for giving yourselves such strange names? Do you ever fight with each other? Do you give each other ranks? Like do you have a leader or what?"

"W-wait please, you're asking questions way to fast!" she was already feeling stressed just from listening to the golden-tan kittypet. "Why don't you come down and I'll try to answer your questions the best I can."

The two blobs leapt down from the fence to sit in front of their new neighbor. Muffin was clearly excited to learn everything she could while Tabby kept an air of coolness about him, although from his

thoughts he seemed just as interested in Clan life as Muffin. "You're correct about us not living with twolegs, we depend fully on ourselves. We live far away from any twoleg civilization, in a forest which is bordered by a fierce and wild river. The trees reach high into the sky, giving us shelter from the intense sunlight as well as from the rain or snow..." she trailed off, unsure as to what the kittypet had meant by the next question. What was this winter she talked of? Looking towards Ink for help, he silently answer.

Winter is a season. It's the coldest out of the four. It's probably called something completely different in the Clan's, right?

Ah, winter must be leaf bare. Nodding her understanding, she continued. "During the winter, our Clan suffers a lot but we still manage to survive. We've learned of ways to lure our prey out of their burrows and on occasion, when the river isn't frozen over, some warriors are willing to try fishing. As for why we go by the names we do... Long story short, our ancestors were saved by a cat with a name much like what we go by now. In order to thank this strange, we began to use names much like his. Our Clan mates never physically fight each other, although we do get into verbal arguments many times. However we do fight against the vicious thief Clans, who prey on weak Clans and steal their kits away from them. Of course only a few are willing to travel far distances to fight these Clans, they are known as Rescuers. We also have cats willing to leave in search of these Clans, for there's no way we'd find them if we never went out to search. They are known as Searchers. Then there's those who are willing to risk their own lives to infiltrate the Clans in order to figure out their strengths and weaknesses. They are known as Spies. Lastly we have the Warriors, they stay behind to protect and guard those who stay behind in the camp. They hunt for the queens and the kits as well as chase away any predators who dare threaten our Clan. Of course we have a leader, the one who ensures that everyone is following our code. Our leader is the one who issues commands and sends cats out on missions. No one is permitted to leave the territory without our leader's say so."

"So why are you here? Are you on a mission or something?" Tabby intense gaze drilled relentlessly into Wisppaw, he clearly wanted an

answer.

"Well um..." she shifted slightly, not wanting to explain the exact reason. "I fell into the river and... I ended up here, wherever here is," separated from her Clan and completely lost. It made her stomach churn from worry. Would she ever manage to get back? Or was she destined to never return to LightClan?

Chapter 16 (Spiritpaw)

"Three days of rest, that sounds really nice right now," Sharppaw was stretching out lazily, soaking up the morning sunlight and enjoying his break from guarding kits. A short while ago, their leader had decided that the Clan needed to rest. The injuries received against the rogues were still healing and everyone had started to grow agitated from the constant walking.

"I don't know, just sitting around doing nothing sounds boring," the ginger tabby let out a sigh, now that he was training to be a fighter he didn't have too many duties right now. He sent a weary glance towards the others of his rank, all of which were either sleeping or sitting around doing nothing. The Stolen on the other hand... the guards still had to keep sentry around the kits and the hunters had left not too long ago to find some prey. Even the searchers were busy, having been sent to scout the nearby area to ensure there wouldn't be any dangers for when the Clan continued its journey.

"Then... want to go and explore the surrounding forest," the white-and-brown tabby stood up and quickly started towards the exit. Someone was clearly in no mood to sit sentry duty over a bunch of kits. "If I'm needed for a guard shift, you can say that you dragged me out. There's no way you, a fighter learner, would get in trouble over something so trivial."

Exploring the forest sounded much more appealing than just sitting around. Following his friend, he left the hideout. It was strange to be standing among such large plants. For all his life, he had lived on rocky plains. Even while traveling, for the most part they had avoided heavily wooded areas.

"I bet we'll find a bunch of strange plants around here," he mused aloud, maybe he should have asked Orangepaw to come with them...

"Who care about plants?" his friend scoffed. "I'm more interested in what sort of prey we'll find around here. I bet there'll be animals

completely different than the ones back on the plains."

Venturing farther from the hideout, the two were like excited kits sneaking out of the camp for the first time. "I feel at home here," the older of the two had focused his orange gaze on the large leaves of a fern. "Who knows, maybe my former Clan used to live in a forest."

The two fell silent for a moment, neither one could remember their past Clans. They were just a distant memory that would occasionally surface in dreams or bring about nostalgic feelings. The only thing that Spiritpaw could remember clearly from his kithood before being stolen was a name. Most likely the name of a family member or a close friend, he couldn't even picture the owner of the name.

That's when he heard a soft rustling from a patch of undergrowth nearby. He sent a glance towards his companion, who clearly heard the sound. Together they started towards the noise, curiosity making the two forget about caution. It happened swiftly, a paw reached out from the shadows and quickly slammed down onto Spiritpaw's head. It left him dizzy from the impact before he collapsed, blacking out.